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ABSTRACT

The paper recommends that young children with disabilities be placed in preschool classes with normally developing children whenever possible. Significant benefits are cited in the areas of social, emotional, and communication development when children with handicapping conditions are educated in settings with their nonhandicapped peers. Four potential options for integrating young children with handicaps and normally developing children are outlined, including mainstreamed educational programs, mainstreamed noneducational programs, integrated special education or reverse mainstreamed programs, and nonintegrated special education programs located in regular elementary schools. Sample programs within each option are briefly described. The paper concludes with a list of 26 references for further information about options and procedures for integrating children with handicaps and normally developing children. (JDD)

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DIVISION FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD

WHITE PAPER

Least Restrictive Environment and Social Integration

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June, 1988

EC 211084

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Least Restrictive Environment and Social Integration for Young Children with Handicaps

P.L. 99-457, like its predecessor, P.L. 94-142, requires that children with handicaps receive educational services in the least restrictive environment (LRE) and, to the maximum extent appropriate, are educated with children who are not handicapped, i.e. in integrated settings. While the interpretation of LRE has become clear for school-aged children, its meaning for preschool children is less certain, particularly in relation to the need to offer integrated settings as placement options.

Professional organizations and advocacy groups, such as the Division for Early Childhood of the Council for Exceptional Children (DEC) and The Association for Persons with Severe Handicaps (TASH) recommend that a critical component of the LRE continuum is the option for placement in preschool classes with normally developing children. TASH recommends that children with disabilities should be placed in classrooms where at least 50% of the children are nonhandicapped (The Association for Persons with Severe Handicaps, 1987). DEC recommends that a continuum of placement options be available for each child and that monitoring of LRE be built into the IEP. Further,

> "If the LRE is determined to be a nonintegrated setting, documentation should be attached to the plan explaining why an integrated placement could not be achieved. Such documentation must include information on supplementary aids and services which were tried before segregation was selected. A timeline for reevaluating and reattempted integration should be included."
>
> [Division for Early Childhood, 1987]

Research on the effects of mainstreaming supports the movement of handicapped children into integrated settings. Across studies, it appears that children with handicaps benefit from educational programs in mainstreamed settings at least as much as they do from programs in nonintegrated settings (Odom & McEvoy, in press). Significant benefits accrue in social, emotional and communication development when children with handicapping conditions are educated in settings with their nonhandicapped peers. However, the factor that determines how well children with handicaps do in mainstreamed programs seems to be the quality of the educational program rather than merely the presence of normally developing children. Research has further demonstrated that social integration in mainstreamed settings will not occur automatically; the teacher must develop specific intervention plans for supporting interaction between children with handicaps and their nonhandicapped peers.

Finally, research has demonstrated that parents of children in mainstreamed settings tend to have positive attitudes toward integration. Moreover, it is clear that the presence of children with handicaps does not hamper the development of the normally developing peers in integrated programs.

The dilemma for integrating preschool children with handicaps is that public schools typically do not provide educational programs or day care for normally developing preschool children. The public mainstream that is available for elementary-aged children with handicaps (i.e., classes for same-aged, normally developing peers) often does not exist for preschool children with handicaps. These circumstances require that public school administrators and parents be creative and assertive in their exploration of options for providing early intervention in settings that include normally developing children.

Four potential options seem to exist for integrating young children with handicaps and normally developing children. Mainstreamed-educational programs occur in settings for normally developing preschoolers (e.g. pre-kindergarten, kindergarten, Head Start) that include an educational program for all of the young children including the child with handicaps. In this type of program, the teacher or a special education consultant would design and implement the individualized educational program (IEP). Mainstreamed-noneducational programs consist of placement in programs for normally developing children that do not typically have an educational component (e.g. day care, nursery school), with implementation of the IEP in a different setting, such as a separate early intervention program that occurs at a different time of day or on different days. Enrollment in this program would be primarily to foster social integration and perhaps to provide respite or day care services for parents. In Integrated Special Education or Reverse Mainstreamed Programs, normally developing children are enrolled in special education classes for young children with handicaps in order to foster social integration of the two groups. In these classes the normally developing children are regular class members but may also serve as peer models. Finally, Nonintegrated Special Education Programs Located in Regular Elementary Schools may be considered an acceptable LRE if there are kindergarten classes available in the building and provisions are made for social integration at various times of the day. This is the minimum acceptable option for LRE for young children with handicaps for center-based programming.

Examples of the above options are described below along with sources the reader may contact for further information.

MAINSTREAMED-EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS

Jefferson County Public Schools
Louisville, Kentucky

A collaboration between the Jefferson County Public Schools, Seven Counties Services, Inc. (a regional Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities Center) and Carriage House Preschool led to the integration of moderately and severely disabled preschool children into preschool programs for nonhandicapped children offered by Jefferson County Public Schools. The philosophy of "unconditional mainstreaming" (Biklen, 1985) guided this collaborative effort to the development of the program now run by Jefferson County Public Schools where on the average there are 5 disabled children in each class of 20-29 children. Children are served in preschool sites as close to their homes or most convenient community location as possible. The curriculum focuses on teaching functional, age-appropriate skills, with other professional services are provided within the context of the classroom environment. For further information contact:

Sandra Mlinarcik
Seven Counties Services
101 W. Muhammad Ali Blvd.
Louisville, KY 40202
(502) 589-4861

Learning Experiences - An Alternative Program For Preschoolers And Parents (LEAP)
Dept. of Psychiatry - University of Pittsburgh
& Pittsburgh Public Schools
Pittsburgh, PA

LEAP preschool is a joint effort between the Department of Psychiatry, University of Pittsburgh and Pittsburgh Public Schools. This program serves six autistic and six normally developing children in each of two preschool classes in a regular elementary school. The LEAP model incorporates training of the normally developing children to intervene on the social skills, language skills and classroom behavior of their handicapped peers. The model also provides for systematic parent training in home and community environments and a plan for the transition of handicapped children into regular class settings. Over two-thirds of LEAP's autistic graduates are making satisfactory progress in regular educational settings. LEAP is an HCEEP Outreach project now developing a network of replication sites. For further information contact:

Dr. Phil Strain
Western Psychiatric Institute and Clinic
3811 O'Hara St.
University of Pittsburgh
Pittsburgh, PA 15213
(412) 624-2012

MAINSTREAMED-NONEDUCATIONAL SETTINGS

Extended Day Care Project
United Cerebral Palsy of Greater Dane County, Inc.
Madison, WI

The Extended Day Care Project helps parents of children with developmental disabilities secure appropriate child care placements in licensed centers and homes. The Project then provides resources to the child care program, as needed, to ensure the inclusion of the child in an integrated play environment. Day care is available year-round (before or after school, full or half days), in a variety of locations. The project provides resource teachers to assist in providing mainstreaming experiences in the day care setting, family referral to inform parents about day care options, and training activities to assist day care staff and children in understanding the special needs of the children who are mainstreamed. Contact for further information:

Betsy Essex, Director
Extended Day Care Project
5902 Raymond Road
Madison, WI 53711
(608) 273-3318

INTEGRATED SPECIAL EDUCATION

Functional Mainstreaming for Success
Developmental Center for Handicapped Persons
Utah State University

This project provides integrated special education placements of handicapped children with nonhandicapped peers. Procedures are developed to 1) identify teacher expectations, child training needs, and teacher assistance and support needs before and during mainstreaming; 2) determine integration activities appropriate for each child; 3) provide activities for functional grouping of handicapped and nonhandicapped peers; and 4) prepare children, families, and staff for mainstreaming. The project has operated three preschool classrooms with a 50:50 ratio of children with and without handicaps. Other integration activities include transition, partial reverse mainstreaming, and buddy systems in

preschool, kindergarten, and first grade classrooms. For further information contact:

Dr. Sebastian Striefel
Developmental Center for Handicapped Persons
Utah State University
Logan, Utah 84322-6800
Phone: (801) 750-1985

NONINTEGRATED PRESCHOOL CLASSROOMS LOCATED IN REGULAR PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Peabody Least Restrictive Environment Project
Nashville, TN

The primary objective of this project is to integrate classrooms for children with severe handicaps who are between four and eight years of age into regular elementary schools of the Metropolitan Nashville School System. The classroom contains four major components: 1) systematic programming for social integration within the classroom and in mainstreamed school activities; 2) implementation of the Individualized Curriculum Sequencing model for instruction; 3) use of a transdisciplinary consultant-therapist approach to delivering support services; and 4) use of the principles of environmental design to promote efficient instructional activities. Contact for further information:

Dr. Mary McEvoy or Dr. Cathy Alpert
Box 328, Peabody College
Vanderbilt University
Nashville, TN 37203
(615) 322-8479

In addition to the examples provided above, a number of federally funded Handicapped Children's Early Education Program Outreach Projects disseminate information and materials for promoting early intervention in the least restrictive environment. Some of these projects and resources are listed below.

ERIN Outreach
376 Bridge Street
Dedham, Massachusetts 02026
Phone: (617) 329-5529
329-3651

Utah Social Integration Program
Developmental Center for Handicapped Persons
Utah State University
Logan, Utah 84322-6805
(801) 750-1991

Early Education Outreach Project
Montana University Affiliated Program
University of Montana
Missoula, Montana 59812
Phone: (406) 243-5467

AIM Outreach
Albuquerque Integration Model
3501 Campus Boulevard, N.E.
Albuquerque, New Mexico 87106
Phone: (505) 266-8811

Hampton University Mainstreaming Outreach Services
Hampton University
Hampton, Virginia 23668
Phone: (804) 727-5751

Jane DeWeerd
RAP Coordinator
Head Start Bureau
400 6th St., S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20013
(202) 755-7944

For more information about options and procedures for integrating children with handicaps and normally developing children, the reader may consult the resources below.

Apolloni, T., & Cooke, T.P. (1978). Integrated programming at the infant, toddler, and preschool levels. In M.J. Guralnick (Ed.), Early intervention and the integration of handicapped and nonhandicapped children. Baltimore: University Park Press.

Bagnato, S.J., Kontos, S., & Neisworth, J.T. (1987). Integrated day care as special education: Profiles of programs and children. Topics in Early Childhood Special Education, 7(1), 28-48.

Bailey, D.B., & Winton, P.J. (1987). Stability and change in parents' expectations about mainstreaming. Topics in Early Childhood Special Education, 7(1), 73-88.

Biklen, D. (1985). Achieving the complete school strategies for effective mainstreaming. New York: Teachers College Press.

Brinker, R.P. (1985). Interactions between severely mentally retarded students and other students in integrated and segregated public school settings. American Journal of Mental Deficiency, 89, 587-594.

Brinker, R.P. & Thorpe, M.E. (1984). Integration of severely handicapped students and the proportion of IEP objectives achieved. Exceptional Children, 51, 168-175.

Brinker, R.P. & Thorpe, M.E. (1986). Features of integrated educational ecologies that predict social behavior among severely mentally retarded and nonretarded students. American Journal of Mental Deficiency, 91, 150-159.

Division for Early Childhood (1987). DEC Position Statements and Recommendations. Reston, VA: Council for Exceptional Children, 1920 Association Drive, Reston, VA 2091.

Furman, W., Rahe, D., & Hartup, W.W. (1980). Rehabilitation of socially withdrawn preschool children through mixed-age and same-age socialization. Child Development, 50, 915-922.

Guralnick, M.J. (1976). The value of integrating handicapped and nonhandicapped pre-school children. American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, 46, 236-245.

Hecimovic, A., Fox, J.J., Shores, R.E., & Strain, P.S. (1985). The effects of integrated and segregated settings on the generalization of newly-acquired social behaviors of socially withdrawn preschoolers. Behavioral Assessment, 7, 367-388.

Hoyson, J., Jamieson, B., & Strain, P.S. (1984). Individualized group instruction for normally developing and autistic-like children: The LEAP curriculum. Journal of the Division for Early Childhood, 8, 1957-172.

Johnson-Dorn, N., Stemel-Campbell, K., & Toews, J. (1984). Developing effective integration between students with severe handicaps and their peers. Monmouth, OR: Teaching Research.

Klein,N., & Sheehan, R. (1987). Staff development: A key issue in meeting the needs of young handicapped children in day care settings. Topics in Early Childhood Special Education, 7(1), 13-27.

Mlinarcik, J.S., (1987). Community partnerships: A collaborative approach for developing integrated preschool programs. In M. Berres and P. Knoblock (eds.), Program models for mainstreaming: Integrating students with moderate to severe disabilities. Rockville, MD: Aspen Publishers.

Odom, S.L., Bender, M.K., Stein, M.L., Doran, L.P., Houden, P.M., McInnes, M., Gilbert, M.M., DeKlyen, M., Speltz, M.L., & Jenkins, J.R. (in press). The Integrated Preschool Curriculum: Procedures for socially integrating handicapped and nonhandicapped children. Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press.

Odom, S.L., DeKlyen, M., & Jenkins, J.R. (1984). Integrating handicapped and nonhandicapped preschool children: Developmental impact on the nonhandicapped children. Exceptional Children, 51, 41-48.

Odom, S.L., & McEvoy, M.A. (1988). Integration of preschool children with handicaps and normally developing children. In S. Odom & M. Karnes (Eds.), Early intervention with infants and children with handicaps: An empirical base. Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co.

Odom, S.L., & Speltz, M.L. (1983). Program variations in preschools for handicapped and nonhandicapped children: Mainstreaming vs. integrated special education. Analysis and Intervention in Developmental Disabilities, 3, 89-104.

Sasso, G.M. & Rude, H.A. (1987). Unprogrammed effects of training high-status peers to interact with severely handicapped children. Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis, 20, 35-44.

Strain, P.S. (1981). Peer-mediated treatment of exceptional children's social withdrawal. Exceptional Education Quarterly, 1, 93-105.

Strain P.S. (1983). Identification of peer social skills for preschool mentally retarded children in mainstreamed classes. Applied Research in Mental Retardation, 4, 369-382.

Strain, P.S. (1984). Social behavior patterns of nonhandicapped and developmentally disabled friend pairs in mainstream preschools. Analysis and Intervention in Developmental Disabilities, 4, 15-28.

Strain, P.S., & Kohler, F. (1988). Social skill intervention with young children with handicaps: Some new conceptualizations and directions. In S.L. Odom & M. Karnes (Eds.), Early intervention with infants and children with handicaps: An empirical base. Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co.

Strain, P.S., & Odom, S.L. (1986). Peer social initiations: Effective intervention for social skills development of exceptional children. Exceptional Children, 52, 543-552.

The Association for Persons with Severe Handicaps. (1987). TASH Reauthorization of the Education of the Handicapped Amendments of 1986: Committee Paper. Seattle, WA: The Association for Persons with Severe Handicaps, 7010 Roosevelt Way NE, Seattle, WA 98115.

For a single additional copy of this White Paper please contact:

The Division for Early Childhood
The Council for Exceptional Children
1920 Association Drive
Reston, Virginia 22091

Duplication of this paper is encouraged